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President: Mr. Lauber (Vice-President) ..... (Switzerland)

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In the absence of Mr. Oh Joon (Republic of Korea), Mr. Lauber (Switzerland), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 9: Special economic, humanitarian and disaster relief assistance (*continued*) (A/71/82-E/2016/60)

High-level panel discussion: "Impediments to the protection of civilians"

1. **Mr. O' Brien** (Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator), moderator, having expressed his condolences to the Government and people of Turkey for the recent attack on Istanbul airport, said that civilian deaths and suffering were continuing unabated due to a blatant and shocking lack of respect for international humanitarian and human rights law. There was something fundamentally wrong in the world when attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure, which contributed significantly to death, displacement and suffering of people, had become so commonplace that they ceased to incite any reaction.

2. To address that grim reality, stakeholders had announced well over 400 commitments at the recently held World Humanitarian Summit. Continued efforts to disseminate, provide training in and promote the law, including among non-State armed actors, had drawn particularly broad support. Stakeholders had also expressed commitments to strengthen the protection of humanitarian and medical personnel and objects, to improve access to humanitarian and medical assistance, and to enhance precautions to minimize harm to civilians and civilian objects during hostilities. The tracking and reporting of violations, and steps to improve accountability and justice for victims, had also been supported. In particular, there was a need to improve significantly the collection, analysis and presentation of data on violations of international humanitarian law in order to demonstrate the human cost of violating the fundamental norms safeguarding humanity.

3. The actions announced at the Summit constituted the first essential steps towards implementing the Agenda for Humanity, set out in the annex to the report of the Secretary-General for the World Humanitarian Summit (A/70/709). All States must use their political and economic leverage to ensure that parties to armed conflict complied with international humanitarian and human rights law, and all stakeholders had a moral obligation to speak out against violations and use their sphere of influence to shape policy decisions.

4. Each specific measure announced at the Summit would, when implemented, make an important contribution to protecting civilians and reducing human suffering worldwide. The international community had a duty to build on the real political will and momentum generated. It must translate into action the commitments undertaken to strengthen the protection of civilians and measure the progress made.

5. He asked what concrete measures States, the Security Council, non-State armed groups and humanitarian organizations should take to address the problem of compliance with the fundamental norms of international humanitarian law.

6. **Mr. Daccord** (Director-General, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)), panellist, said that it was essential to discuss issues related to the protection of civilians and respect for international humanitarian law in forums such as the Council. Although the solution was relatively simple, it was also challenging. On the one hand, international humanitarian law was an essential tool that provided a solid legal framework for reducing the human cost of conflict and for managing a number of issues linked to migration and displacement. On the other hand, implementation of public international law and international humanitarian law could sometimes be problematic given difficulties in ensuring the necessary degree of convergence between States.

7. While organizations such as his were there to provide assistance to facilitate implementation, primary responsibility for respecting and ensuring compliance with international humanitarian law lay with States. It was important to identify steps to be taken to facilitate the practical implementation of international humanitarian law in each country and build on intergovernmental initiatives that could provide assistance in that regard. He noted that two of the resolutions of the 32nd International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in December 2015 dealt specifically with the question of strengthening international humanitarian law.

8. **Mr. O'Brien** (Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief

Coordinator) asked what roles should be played by the Security Council, States, other parties to conflict and humanitarian organizations in implementing Security Council resolution 2286 (2016) regarding the protection of health care in armed conflict.

9. **Mr. Cone** (Executive Director, Médecins sans frontières — United States), panellist, said that States were making a political choice in allowing the frameworks, rules and norms in place for the protection of civilians to be contravened. His organization had experienced over one hundred attacks against its facilities during a number of conflicts, and unfortunately four of the five permanent members of the Security Council had been part of coalitions linked to some of those incidents. States must be willing to uphold norms of international law, accept investigation and be held to account for their actions.

10. As a bare minimum, organizations such as his must be able to hold a dialogue with parties to a conflict in order to gain safe access to populations. It was not acceptable to criminalize the act of providing medical care to the wounded and sick, including to the enemy. All attacks must be investigated in a credible, impartial and independent manner at the national or international level, with a view to preventing further attacks in the future. It was not sufficient for States to investigate themselves, and the Security Council could play an important role in generating a feedback and accountability loop.

11. **Mr. O'Brien** (Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator) said that he would like to know the key reasons behind armed groups' violations of international humanitarian law; how their degree of willingness to respect international humanitarian law had evolved; and how the international community could facilitate efforts to enhance their compliance.

12. **Ms. Decrey-Warner** (Executive President, Geneva Call), panellist, said that there were a number of reasons for violations of international humanitarian law by the hundreds of armed groups that existed. Many non-State armed actors were unaware of, or did not understand, the rules of humanitarian law, and a sense of ownership was more likely to result in compliance. Such groups often had weak chains of command, with combatants operating in remote places at considerable distance from their leaders. The capacity to respect certain humanitarian norms and obligations was often lacking. The longer a conflict lasted, the more likely it was that violations of international humanitarian law would increase.

13. As to the willingness of groups to respect international humanitarian law, she said that a study of 19 different armed groups for the World Humanitarian Summit had shown that, while the groups had demonstrated an interest in learning more about the norms of international humanitarian law, not all were ready to respect them. It was important to remember that changes in behaviour would take time.

14. The international community could facilitate efforts to enhance respect of international humanitarian law among armed groups by working on issues of access. In addition, humanitarian actors were often criminalized for their contact with so-called terrorist groups. The complementarity that existed in the activities of States, non-governmental organizations and United Nations agencies should be recognized, as should the need for political support for educating non-State armed actors in humanitarian law.

15. **Mr. O'Brien** (Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator) asked what major challenges health-care workers faced in providing impartial medical care to the wounded and sick.

16. **Mr. Abdulkarim** (Director, Iraqi Health and Social Care Organization), panellist, said that there were a number of challenges concerning the provision of medical care in Iraq. At the macro level, the State lacked the preparedness necessary to respond rapidly to an emergency situation. Impediments at the micro level included access to medical facilities and resources in cities under siege or attack, as well as the destruction of infrastructure. Non-governmental organizations also faced logistical problems in providing health-related services. Persons with disabilities were particularly vulnerable. Internally displaced persons placed a further burden on the public health system in certain areas. Abuse of health system resources by State and non-State actors also made access to health-care institutions difficult.

17. **Mr. O'Brien** (Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator) asked about the impact of the monitoring and reporting mechanism on grave violations against children in armed conflict, and whether it had

motivated political action to seek to end violations and enhance accountability.

18. **Ms. Zerrougui** (Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict), panellist, said that the monitoring and reporting mechanism had been established by the Security Council in 2005 at the request of Member States as a tool for the provision of credible information that was verified by the United Nations. Where the necessary political will existed, the mechanism, which was triggered by the listing of parties and had legitimacy, allowed conflicting parties to engage constructively with the highest United Nations representative of the country concerned and with all other relevant stakeholders. Progress in ending violations was being made through the mechanism: 9 out of 25 action plans had been finalized and some 150,000 children had been released over the previous 20 years. It was important that the tools Member States themselves had put in place continued to be protected and strengthened.

19. **Mr. Jabbar** (Iraq) said that coordination was needed between the Government of Iraq and the many United Nations agencies working in the country to ensure the best outcome for the people on the ground. Any violations must be identified very quickly so that they could be acted upon. He asked what practical measures Governments could take to provide for better coordination with United Nations agencies.

20. **Ms. Baglole** (United Kingdom) said that non-compliance with international humanitarian law was the greatest impediment to the protection of civilians. More emphasis should be placed on raising awareness of the need for compliance with international humanitarian law among non-State armed groups before outbreaks of hostility, and there should be no impunity for States or non-State armed actors violating their obligations. The United Kingdom fully supported the work of the International Criminal Court, its ad hoc tribunals and national courts to hold those found in non-compliance to account. Noting that, in the context of armed conflict, international humanitarian law guaranteed access for the provision of humanitarian assistance and the protection of all civilians, she asked what further practical steps could be taken to obtain access to people in need during conflict situations.

21. **Mr. Bessler** (Switzerland) said that civilians were often targeted and used as weapons of war, despite States having undertaken to comply with the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. To improve the protection of civilians, military standard operating procedures should be reviewed to ascertain how much of a distinction was actually made between civilian and military objects, and between combatants and non-combatants. Switzerland was in favour of a full, prompt, impartial and effective investigation in the event of violations, and was disappointed that the International Humanitarian Fact-Finding Commission, established pursuant to article 90 of the Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts, had not yet been utilized. Data, including on positive measures, should be collected and analysed. Domestic legislation adopted must be consistent with international humanitarian law; it should ensure that humanitarian action was not hampered by counter-terrorism measures and that medical activities compatible with medical ethics could be conducted. Efforts must also be made to disseminate international humanitarian law among all those carrying weapons.

22. **Mr. Daccord** (Director-General, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)) said that dialogue and close collaboration with national authorities were essential in protecting civilians and resolving humanitarian crises. Respect for international humanitarian law by the State and parties to a conflict radically changed the situation for affected populations and lowered the humanitarian cost of conflict. ICRC was ready to help States ensure respect for international humanitarian law and was also working to find ways of further improving respect for international humanitarian law at the intergovernmental level.

23. While States had a responsibility to permit access for humanitarian organizations, humanitarian organizations also had responsibilities. Humanitarian action could not be imposed on States or populations, and an ongoing dialogue must be undertaken with the State and parties to a conflict to build the transparency and trust necessary. Direct access to affected populations, rather than access through local partners, should be prioritized, even in the most difficult areas, because it facilitated an understanding of the needs and challenges of the populations and ensured a response that could be tailored accordingly. Humanitarian organizations must also identify the risks they were willing to take. While organizations should be careful,

they should be ready to take the risks necessary to reach the populations in need.

24. **Mr. Abdulkarim** (Director, Iraqi Health and Social Care Organization) recalled that Iraq had been in constant conflict since 2003. On the operational side, United Nations agencies and international and local non-governmental organizations could work with the Iraqi Government on establishing a rapid response plan, taking into consideration community-based approaches to health-care provision. The development of a nationwide preparedness plan to enable the country to respond to emergencies, crises or conflict situations could facilitate the development of alternative solutions. On the policy side, the United Nations and international non-governmental organizations could work with the Iraqi Government to enhance respect for international humanitarian law. Training similar to that already provided by Geneva Call might also be provided to stakeholders, including non-State armed forces or militia working with the Government.

25. **Mr. Cone** (Executive Director, Médecins sans frontières — United States) said that discussion about impediments to the protection of civilians must also address the right of civilians to flee violence. The political choices of States were hampering the ability of civilians to flee conflict safely and increasing the vulnerability of those lucky enough to escape. If States were to protect civilians, they had to review their policies. Critical consideration should also be given by the United Nations and contributing countries as to whether emergency measures, such as the protection of civilian sites in South Sudan, were actually achieving their objective and meeting basic standards of humanity, including in terms of the provision of assistance.

26. **Ms. Zerrougui** (Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict) said that the formation, under the monitoring and reporting mechanism, of an interministerial coordination body composed of representatives of relevant ministries, government agencies and partners on the ground would promote a comprehensive dialogue to encourage implementation and the building of trust, including in Iraq. Access was sometimes refused as a means of punishing the population or of preventing the international community from witnessing the situation on the ground. Member States needed to understand that it was in their interests to provide access for monitoring and for the provision of support and humanitarian assistance. Such access would help Governments, which were held accountable by their people, to move forward and resolve issues.

27. **Ms. Decrey-Warner** (Executive President, Geneva Call) said that the fundamental right of a civilian to receive assistance, irrespective of whether he or she was in an area controlled by armed actors or the Government, must remain the focus. There were two types of access being discussed. The first was the access authorized by States to allow United Nations agencies or non-governmental organizations to engage with armed groups; too many States were still denying that access. The second was the access granted to humanitarian organizations by conflicting parties for the provision of medical assistance in hospitals. Research had shown that non-State armed actors were more likely to grant access to humanitarian organizations if they had received education and training, and if trust had been built before a crisis became extreme. Humanitarian organizations themselves also had a responsibility to demonstrate impartiality and neutrality.

28. **Mr. Seleka** (South Africa) said it was a matter of concern that impunity was making non-compliance the norm. The compliance of all parties with international humanitarian law must be strengthened and existing gaps closed so that attacks on health facilities could not be portrayed as collateral damage. Violations must be investigated in an independent and impartial manner. He wondered why the International Humanitarian Fact-Finding Commission had not been utilized for such investigations. He would also like to know why Médecins sans frontières had decided to withdraw from the World Humanitarian Summit.

29. **Mr. Digiovanna** (United States of America) asked what lessons could be learned from the monitoring and reporting mechanism with a view to obtaining better data to address the access challenge.

30. **Ms. Cleason** (International Federation of Medical Students' Associations), speaking on behalf of the children and youth major group, asked how security risks to different sectors of the population could be better identified, and how data collection and disaggregation could be more effectively used in that regard. She also asked how the international community could create strong incentives for non-State

actors to fulfil their responsibilities under international humanitarian law.

31. **Ms. Zerrougui** (Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict), recalling that the mechanism in place was a tool not simply for monitoring and reporting violations, but also for engaging with parties, said that direct contact with the parties concerned was not to be feared and did not confer greater legitimacy on them, but was generally in the interests of all. It would create the space for further discussion and identification by the parties themselves of actions to help move the situation forward. The situation in Colombia, where the parties to the conflict were engaging in a peace process to develop an action plan, was a good example of the progress that could be made.

32. **Mr. Csada** (Observer for the European Union) said that the European Union would continue to protect civilians, including those fleeing from conflict, and ensure compliance with international humanitarian law. It would welcome the holding of regular voluntary meetings among nations to discuss thematic issues and reports on the implementation of international humanitarian law. The European Union was concerned about the increasing attacks on humanitarian personnel and agreed that the act of treating the wounded should not be criminalized. States should fight impunity and systematically monitor and report on violations, which should be independently investigated. Non-State armed actors did not know enough about international humanitarian law, and the European Union would continue its efforts to raise awareness, provide training and build trust. He asked what role regional organizations could play in promoting respect for international humanitarian law, given that ensuring compliance was usually a State responsibility.

33. **Mr. Lindroos** (Finland), expressing appreciation for the work undertaken by the organizations represented on the panel, said that his Government attached high priority to promoting compliance with international humanitarian law. He asked how the particular challenges faced by the most vulnerable populations, including children, the elderly and persons with disabilities, could best be addressed during conflict and emergencies.

34. **Mr. Cone** (Executive Director, Médecins sans frontières — United States) said that while his organization had welcomed the strong support for the provision of health care expressed in the report of the Secretary-General for the World Humanitarian Summit (A/70/709), it had decided to withdraw from that event since it did not expect it to deliver the required humanitarian response. Médecins sans frontières also disagreed fundamentally with the notion of the humanitarian-development nexus, and considered that the two areas should be separated. While development was critical and had its place, all too often basic needs in terms of health care, water, sanitation and food were not being met, not only in conflict areas but also in the camps outside those areas. His organization was also uncomfortable with the rhetoric around the concept of resilience of States and systems, and their ability to respond to disasters. Refugees and internally displaced persons, who were incredibly resilient, were often left to their own devices pending the provision of assistance, which sometimes took months rather than days. The reform agenda was not ambitious enough to address the core humanitarian response needs.

35. As to the role of regional organizations, he said that Security Council resolution 2286 (2016) had been sponsored by Member States from all major regions of the world, and discussion should continue in regional bodies. Given the significant difficulties faced by vulnerable people in conflict situations, endorsement of the Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action was one of the most important outcomes of the Summit.

36. **Mr. Daccord** (Director-General, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)) said that regional organizations played an essential role in ensuring respect for international humanitarian law. The African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa was a good example of how a regional organization had fostered ownership and developed a solution appropriate to the communities involved. Peacekeeping was another important area of activity involving regional organizations. Much remained to be done to address the particular challenges faced by persons with disabilities. While activities on the ground often focused on physical rehabilitation, efforts must be made at the national level to implement the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and to identify ways of financing humanitarian assistance for such persons in the medium and long term.

37. **Ms. Decrey-Warner** (Executive President, Geneva Call), emphasizing the need for long-term

investment in training, said that Geneva Call and other non-governmental organizations had worked with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia for a number of years. It was no coincidence that the three subjects around which they had focused their activities had been incorporated as essential elements of the peace agreement.

38. **Ms. Zerrougui** (Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict) said that the incidence of disability was much higher in conflicts because, without access to health care, a small injury could degenerate into a disability. Regional organizations had legitimacy and played an important role in protecting the work of those seeking to ensure respect for international humanitarian law, in advancing peace processes and in providing a response.

39. **Mr. O'Brien** (Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator) asked what could be done to ensure that those who violated international humanitarian law did not enjoy impunity.

40. **Mr. Daccord** (Director-General, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)) said that implementation of the existing legal framework must begin with the State through its national legislation. Education, although important, was not enough to systematically influence behaviour in a situation of extreme violence; sanctions were also required and must be included in national legislation. Although tools were being implemented at the international level, much also remained to be done in the area of international justice. The international community needed to be mobilized in order to respond to specific challenges, and Security Council resolution 2286 (2016) was an example of the progress that could be made. Mechanisms also needed to be developed to ensure continued respect for international law. ICRC and the Swiss Government were undertaking intergovernmental consultations aimed at establishing a forum whereby States could examine compliance with international humanitarian law at the 33rd International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in 2019.

41. **Mr. O'Brien** (Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator) said that it was important to gather and monitor data and trends concerning international humanitarian law more systematically, and to disseminate the information to parties to a conflict and Member States so that key issues could be addressed. Processes also needed to be in place to ensure that perpetrators did not enjoy impunity.

42. **Ms. Decrey-Warner** (Executive President, Geneva Call) said that a balance must be struck between incentives and sanctions. As non-State armed actors were frequently in denial, they must be made aware of the existence of violations and of their responsibilities to prevent them from recurring. Furthermore, they must be informed that they would not enjoy impunity, that peace would never be built on atrocities, and that their current behaviour would influence the future. States also had a responsibility to set an example and demonstrate their commitment to international humanitarian law and to existing mechanisms, such as the monitoring and reporting mechanism and the International Humanitarian Fact-Finding Commission.

43. **Mr. Cone** (Executive Director, Médecins sans frontières — United States) agreed that those who broke the law should be punished. Checks and balances must be put in place at the State, regional and international levels, including through multilateral systems, investigative bodies and international tribunals, to ensure that corrective measures were taken. In such a dynamic and dangerous environment as conflict, there were a number of grey areas in the rules concerning engagement with structures that might house civilians. Those rules must be simplified to ensure that an active hospital could never be a legitimate target. There were no baseline data capable of capturing the real impact of such incidents in terms of loss of services.

44. **Ms. Zerrougui** (Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict) said that it was essential to change behaviour by combating impunity. In order to gain legitimacy and support, Governments must lead by example and send strong messages to their troops on the ground that those violating international humanitarian law would not enjoy impunity. Systems also needed to be put in place to guarantee an appropriate response to violations in different contexts, such as in remote areas.

45. **Mr. O'Donnell** (World Federation for Mental Health) said that a better understanding of the

psychology that perpetuated intractable conflicts, and of the psychological tactics for avoiding accountability, could help to inform the discussion. He drew attention to a number of sources of relevant material in that regard.

46. **Mr. O'Brien** (Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator) asked what was deterring people from returning to areas of Iraq that had been liberated from Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant.

47. **Mr. Abdulkarim** (Director, Iraqi Health and Social Care Organization) said that destruction of infrastructure, concerns about security constraints and screening, fear of retaliatory attacks, and reluctance to leave safer and more stable locations were some of the factors preventing people from returning to liberated areas.

48. **Mr. O'Brien** (Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator) asked how the monitoring and reporting mechanism, which was a tool of the United Nations and thus of Member States, could ever be truly objective and hold armed groups and forces accountable.

49. **Ms. Zerrougui** (Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict) said that the mechanism provided for engagement at many levels with Member States and other parties to a conflict. Responsibility for implementation was assigned to the highest United Nations representatives in a country, namely Special Representatives of the Secretary-General, Regional Coordinators and representatives of the United Nations Children's Fund, who co-chaired the Country Task Force for Monitoring and Reporting. The mechanism, in conjunction with the process for listing and delisting and the relevant action plans, was effective in holding to account those who committed violations. It might, however, be possible to develop a mechanism with Member States and non-State actors that went even further to stop the violations. Noting the near universal ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, she said that the challenge was now to convince States that it was not in their interests to commit other violations, such as killing and maiming children, attacks on schools and hospitals, and the abduction of children, which had been triggered for listing in 2009, 2011 and 2015, respectively.

50. **Mr. O'Brien** (Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator) asked about the impact on the protection of civilians of the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas.

51. **Mr. Daccord** (Director-General, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)) said that where explosive weapons with wide-area effects were used in heavily populated areas, the likelihood of indiscriminate effects was high. Those weapons caused major civilian losses and damage, including to essential services. States must be encouraged not to use such weapons in urban areas, and ICRC sought to engage in a dialogue on the conduct of military operations in those areas. The prison population and the families of missing persons should not be overlooked in a discussion on protection of civilians.

52. **Mr. Abdulkarim** (Director, Iraqi Health and Social Care Organization) said that the provision of risk education to populations in danger, including children, was a key element in reducing the number of casualties among the civilian population.

53. **Mr. O'Brien** (Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator) said that efforts were always made to gather the evidence required to hold people to account, in some cases even after the resolution of a conflict. Questions as to whether impunity or an amnesty could be offered in order to achieve peace were highly complex.

54. **Ms. Decrey-Warner** (Executive President, Geneva Call) said that it was important to recognize that all parties to a conflict, including non-State armed actors, must respect international humanitarian law. Engagement with armed groups should be the rule, not the exception. Recognition of efforts made by all parties to a conflict, including armed groups, provided an incentive to continue such efforts and might encourage action by other groups. In order to leave no one behind, the international community must work together to identify inventive solutions that offered a viable alternative to fighting, including for freed child soldiers. She suggested the holding of a forum on lessons learned and on how to engage all conflicting parties in respecting and ensuring protection for civilians.

55. **Mr. Cone** (Executive Director, Médecins sans frontières — United States) said he would like to know how the multilateral system, States and regional bodies would ensure accountability in the event of violations of international humanitarian law and how Security Council resolution 2286 (2016) would be implemented, giving due visibility to accountability. An independent and impartial mechanism was required to establish the facts and the types of sanctions required; however, any mechanisms put in place must be meaningful and could not be politicized. Victims of violations should be compensated. The United Nations should engage in an honest reflection of its experience of protecting civilians in specially created sites, including those in South Sudan, particularly regarding such aspects as safety and the provision of assistance. It was important to allow and empower teams in the field to make decisions about the risks they were prepared to take to reach populations. While the consent of parties to a conflict was important for the security of teams on the ground, arbitrary denial of assistance was not acceptable.

56. **Mr. Daccord** (Director-General, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)) said that States played an essential role in ensuring respect for international humanitarian law. It would therefore be useful, in a future discussion, for States to be represented on the panel in order to share their experiences, know-how, best practices and challenges. It was important for the international community to find ways of working together to ensure that the existing legal framework was implemented. Security Council resolution 2286 (2016) was a key element in protecting those providing assistance and he trusted that it would be fully implemented in all countries. Lastly, when talking about protection of civilians, it was important not to forget vulnerable populations such as prisoners, missing persons, and persons with physical and mental disabilities.

57. **Ms. Zerrougui** (Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict) said that children were not merely the accidental victims of conflict; they were being increasingly targeted, including by troops representing or associated with Governments, as a means of seeking revenge against parents. Denial was neither a solution nor response; such Governments must find out what was happening in their countries and why, face up to reality and rectify the situation.

58. **Mr. Abdulkarim** (Director, Iraqi Health and Social Care Organization) said that a lack of information about perpetrators, victims and causes impeded interventions by international or local organizations. The international community should therefore identify a mechanism to ensure a flow of information for the benefit of civilians.

59. **Mr. O'Brien** (Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator), summarizing the discussion, said that there was broad agreement that non-compliance was the main problem and that a political choice lay at the heart of a State's ability to reduce the human cost of war. Key components to promote compliance included the existence of robust legal frameworks, preparedness to respond to crises, dialogue with all conflicting parties, fact-finding missions and data collection. In order to instil confidence, credible and independent investigations must be conducted and violations of international humanitarian law must be punished.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.